Book Reviews

Review Article


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This work is an interesting contribution to the growing body of English-language articles and books on the post-1902 history of the Malay-speaking Muslims of Thailand’s three southernmost states of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani, historically the independent Muslim kingdom of Patani. Rohan Gunaratna entered the world of counter-terrorism intelligence and studies in a way that some characterized as picaresque at the time; and his writings and globe-trotting interviews for a while had a penchant for violent scenes, and the conflating of movements with few links to each other, with which he struck alarm into some in the West. By 2006, Tim Palmer of the Australian Broadcasting Commission was advising the Australian media not to utilize Gunaratna on grounds that his entanglements with so many intelligence agencies could warp anything he said or wrote. Some saw Rohan Gunaratna as having been crafted by Singapore intelligence into a conduit for external propaganda to help that island-statelet, with US help, achieve dominance among Muslim neighbour-states it still fears but underestimates, after all these decades.

Yet this particular book by Gunaratna, Arabinda Acharya and Sabrina Chua on the whole is professional and academic. It does not force upon its subject, the Patani Malays, concerns — and international movements — from the Middle East where these are still secondary for them. It does have to

* The reviewer is grateful to Ms Virginie Andre, PhD researcher on Southern Thai movements in the Department of Politics at Monash University, for first providing me with a copy of Gunaratna, Achary and Chua’s book.
consider points at which the fight of the Patani Jihadists could link into a coordinated Jihad [Jihād] by such movements as al-Qā‘īdah and the Jama‘ah Islāmiyyah in Southeast Asia, but also tries to analyze the Islamo-nationalist movements of Patani on their own terms. It succeeds in this at least for the organizational expression of Patani nationalism.

Although he sometimes sees himself and his Singapore colleagues as partners with the Thai governing elite, not to say America, in a shared global war against terrorism, and this stance is not exactly academic, Gunaratna, assisted by Acharya and Chua, does tell Patani history as it was and is. His review of the twentieth century history of the Thai elites’ “hasty and brutal” drives to overpower, regiment and in language Thaicize the Malay Muslims of the South, the corrupt extractive nature of many officials sent to the South, and the economic relative deprivation of the Southerners compared to the other regions (see pp. 10–15), explains why many Patanians have time and again risen up to struggle for their independence. Nor is it merely that most in the successive Thai ruling groups have wanted to replace the Malay language of the Patanians with their own. Islam, also, has been a constant target of the social engineering. The Buddhist Thai governing class sees the survival of its system in the South as dependent in the short term on reducing Islam to a dead shell of nominal rituals that, filled up with the Thai language and motifs from it, cannot then sustain coherent counter-community. Carrying the process further, Thai administrations help West-patterned Thai TV neopaganism — “fun” — to then corrode away at even that remaining husk of a bygone Islam among this minority that the Thai system is out to atomize and dissolve. Such declarations, which the Thais alternate with violence and the “disappearances” in their repertoire, bear out the Jihadists that the Patanians have been fighting since early 2004 to “protect the purity of Islam from those who want to annihilate the teachings of Islam” (booklet: Berjihād di-Patani), quoted in Gunaratna et al, Conflict and Terrorism, p. 125). For the protean Thai strategies for de-Islamizing the Patanians see, e.g., suggestions to Thai ministers by Interior Minister Bhokin Bhalakul under PM Thaksin that rock music, soap operas and movies should be fostered in the South as an instrument to “win over Muslim youth by replacing fanaticism with fun.”

The book cuts through problems scholars face in analyzing in perspective the decades-long evolution of these movements. One very helpful section is the listing and characterization that Gunaratna, Acharya and Chua offer (see, pp. 157–195) of the main secessionist organizations, their broad beliefs and their sequential evolution. This synthesis-overview begins with the foundation

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1 “Unrest in Muslim Provinces: Thais ’may need 10 years to bring peace to South,”” Straits Times (24 July 2004), A16.
of the Barisan Revolusi National (BRN: National Revolutionary Front) in 1960 under Amin Tohmina, the son of al-Hajj Sallum (Sulong), the mass protest leader who was disappeared in 1954; the splitting off of the Patani National Liberation Front in 1972; the development of BRN into an urban guerrilla group that suffered violent splits from 1977–1995; the Patani United Liberation Organization or PULO that became the biggest of the Patani secessionist groups; the splitting off of the “New PULO”; the rise since 1995 of the Patani Islamic Mujahidin Movement (GMIP), a group with links to the global Jihadist ideology of restoration of Caliphate, to Middle Eastern Salafī Jihadists, and to similar movements in Southeast Asia; the creation in 1989 of the Bersatu (United) umbrella organization of militant malcontents from the preceding organizations that has become a fighting organization in its own right; and the PUSAKA Foundation of Islamic schools that this book interprets is training teachers to propagate Islamic secessionist aspirations in Islamic schools in Narathiwat statelet in particular. Gunaratna and his team are themselves not optimistic (see p. 166) that they have definitively untangled all the splits and amalgamations and ideological concepts of the confusing plethora of Patani organizations, but they have made some tasks of all of us considerably lighter.

The book’s diagrams of the structure of the BRN are admirably lucid, yet this book is better at charting organizations as shaky, fissiparous institutions, than exploring the changing cultures and ideological concepts that, after all, motivate their Patanian Muslim members to fight for independence. One has to fault this plane of the work that the team has only spoken of the beliefs of the followers of these groups in very broad and incomplete terms. In this alternation of clarity and vagueness, Gunaratna, Acharya and Chua may draw on studies of Thai intelligence agencies that focus organizations, factions and personalities much more sharply than the interior belief-world of the fighting members. But it is troubling that these three researchers based in Singapore do not try to draw on even one Malay-language communication from these organizations. This is surprising in that the book seems to draw on, as well as flow into, Singapore intelligence, which serves a government whose leaders have for decades legitimized themselves to their electorate as its bulwark against Islamo-Malay nationalism in the region, and which at least in the 1970s carefully analyzed vernacular communications by Malay militants in Malaysia. Couldn’t Gunaratna have got some Malay leaflets of the BRN, the BPNP, the PULOs, the Islamic Mujahidin and the PUSAKA in Kelantan, the statelet of Malaysia that borders on Patani — or coaxed some out of his acquaintances in Thai intelligence?
However, Gunaratna’s book does give a very overdue and welcome translation of one key new Patani text on jihād in Malay, *Berjihad di-Patani* [“Waging Jihād in Patani”: 2002]. We examine their translation below.

Gunaratna, Acharya and Chua’s attempt to differentiate (a) as quasi-secular, PULO and other post-1970 independence movements from (b) a recent more Islamic resistance fuelled by radicalizing pondoks (Islamic schools), runs the risk of facile dichotomization and periodization. There were in the earlier movements material stakes in fighting, and local specificities in discourse-identities, that look secular or non-Islamic to the Western way of viewing things. But PULO had one of its crucial bases in Mecca or Sa’udi Arabia that was already seeing the evolution of ideas for the later “salafist”-Sunni ideology of jihād. If PULO modelled at least its marketing to the world of its small homeland struggle on the PLO, like the PLO it, too, also waged pan-Islamic diplomacy and lobbying in Arab and Muslim states. That PULO to some extent took form in acculturated Muslim institutions, e.g. Aligarh University, in the communal cauldron of India gave it some texture of Anglophone modernity, but was not conducive to it evolving a real secular nationalism truly intent to integrate the diverse religious and ethnic groups living in Patani. It may be best to view less single-mindedly religious small-homeland independence struggles of Patanians, Palestinians, etc.—and quasi-secular pan-Arab nationalism itself with its “eternal mission” beyond the Arab sphere—as blends of a variety of elements, one of which is Islam. This frame of perspective would see Islam and Arabic as having always been important in Malay Patanian identity in a blend with other fluids, but as having become stronger since 2000. Gunaratna, Acharya and Chua argued that violence and activism in Southern Thailand predated the rise of jihadist Islam in the Arab world and Afghanistan in the late 20th century—“this is evidenced in the December 1975 protests in Narathiwat which were the largest anti-government rallies in the history of the region” (p. 9). Yet our research has shown the centrality of Islamic collective rituals, Islamic institutions and Islamic community terminology (e.g. “orang-orang Islam” rather than “Malays”) in the 1975 mass protests, including for those Patanian Muslims who were getting bilingualized and acculturated in Thai educational institutions to the thoughts of Thais. It is true that I did not encounter the word “Jihad” in the Patanian text on the 1975 mass demonstrations that I myself have analyzed, i.e. E. Bangnara (pseudo,/*Patani Forces Research Panel,* *Patani Dahulu dan Sekarang* — Kelantan: n.p., 1977). Arabophone graduates of local and overseas Islamic schools were many among both the leaders and members of all the secessionist organizations that Gunaratna traced, but the 1975 demonstrations show the strength with which Islam could
act as a frame that can bring together a militant alliance across diverse educational elites and classes.

In regard to primary Malay-language communications of Patani’s Muslim nationalists, this is overall not a book that offers much. Its outstanding contribution, though, is that it has offered an extensive translation from the most crucial recent Malay text, the booklet titled *Berjihad di-Patani* (“Waging Jihad in Patani”), which was found on the bodies of some youth who took part in the 28 April 2004 attacks. Although at points clearly not exact, this translation from Malay is the most important contribution of this work by Gunaratna, Acharya and Chua. I now analyse the text of *Berjihad di-Patani* that Gunaratna’s study has conveyed to Muslim and Arab—not just non-Muslim scholars—who cannot read Malay.

The booklet *Berjihad di-Patani* cited the early history and battles of Islam during the life-time of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), and in one or two softer passages urged its readers to be bound by Muḥammad’s code of war, inspired by the Qur’ān: “nobody among us should kill children, women or destroy houses and farms due to anger, because Allah will not be pleased with such actions” (p. 129), nor should those who declare their surrender be killed (p. 139). On the whole, though, this Islamist nationalist work urged the Patanians to kill the enemy Thais wherever they could find them.

The majority of Thais have a dislike of manifestation of Islam in public space, and a strong minority of them hate Muslims they encounter, however meek and accommodating those Muslims may make themselves. Nonetheless, in government schools and even in some pondok schools affiliated to the state, Muslim Malay children and teenagers interact with Buddhist teachers and classmates, some of who want to equip them to get jobs, pulling them to the Thai language and culture. Although not there in their ratio of the population, some Muslims do go on to get jobs in the Thai civil service, further pulling them to the Thai language and culture, again. But I believe that it is not some principle extrapolated from the Qur’ān but the complete and planned threat to language and social intactness—calculated and systemic deculturation—a threat orchestrated by successive Thai administrations, that made the authors of *Berjihad di-Patani* urge the Patanians to “socialize solely with people of the same nationality and religion, only” (p. 131). However, Isma’il ‘Ali, who had a position as a director of the College of Islamic Studies at the Thai Prince of Songkhla University in “Pattani” statelet, spearheaded a campaign by accommodationist Muslim intellectuals to save “communal harmony,” that is the day-to-day community with Buddhist Thais, by challenging the booklet’s selective excerpting from the Qur’ān: he charged that it misleads by omissions in order to exhort to quick violence (see p. 59). The booklet *Berjihad di-Patani*
was highly abstract: it mustered Qur’anic verses in allusion to specific situations that most Patanians suffered, with no concern to flesh those situations out for any outsiders to understand. In denouncing as “hypocrites” (munafiqun) those who “take and support unbelievers as their leaders with the intention of seeking their favor” (p. 125), the booklet likely meant the failed Thai liberal parliamentarism of the 1990s—Muslims who joined, or supported, the electoral political parties and the movements conducted by Thai Buddhists from Bangkok, but in the upshot to the benefit mainly of that small coopted minority of Muslims, not of the people.

Given that there has been some deformed integration of a minority of Muslims into the Thai central state through education in Thai medium, and through some jobs since 1970, the drive of this set of Jihadists to separate Malay Muslims from Thais and then fight the latter, runs tension and a long fracture down through Patani Muslim society, even down into its base-unit of families. Gunaratna, Acharya and Chua are right to see current Patani Jihadist nationalism as a contender-ideology among today’s Patani Muslims, not a consensus to which the harsh oppression from some Thais has as yet led the collective body of those Muslims. Berjihad di-Patani defined “hypocrites”—those who collaborated with Thais, or were not eager to fight their huge army, or who mustered a divergent chain of Qur’anic verses—as “your most dangerous enemy today.” “Let us fight and extirpate them until we are safe from their disturbances” (p. 126). “Know that they are no longer relatives and parents.” “The believers” [=those who will henceforth follow the directives and strategy of the two authors] are not to take protection from physical fathers and brothers who prefer infidelity to faith, or pray at their graves (see, 126, citing Qur’an 9: 23, 84). Those are no longer parents. One can foresee from the data that Gunaratna and his team offer that a further heightening of the insurgency could wreak division, havoc and self-inflicted wounds upon the Patani Muslims beyond anything occasioned by, say, the Algerian national revolution for independence (1954–1962) that also evoked Jihad.

While this study tries to monitor interaction between Middle Eastern Muslims and the Patanians, it concludes that Berjihad di-Patani at least was locally-improvised incitement to resistance. Thus the Patani uprising “does not fall into the global jihad phenomenon” represented by al-Qā'idah (p. 9). I myself would see the booklet as a recent development in a native, local chain or tradition of resistance movements that have been couched in terms of Jihad to beat off or expel the Thai idol-worshippers for two centuries. In its trajectory to modernized, radical Jihad to achieve the nation’s indigenous interests, the Patani literate discourse, for two centuries influenced by the
learned Arabic works of the Middle East, now meets with the modernist reinventions of Jihad in the Middle East and the Philippines, and can lock into those movements for joint actions. Themes that Thais are polytheists who have to be driven out of Patani by Jihad were formulated by the legist al-Shaykh Dāwūd al-Fatānī in the numerous Malay writings he penned from Arabia in the late 18th century. His younger interpreter, Muḥammad Ibn Ismāʿīl al-Fatānī, stated that, since the time of the prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), if non-Muslims attacked a Muslim state, then all Muslims in that state had to take part in the Jihad as fārḍ ʿayn, a personal obligation—including children, women, slaves and the indebted. Once the polytheists were defeated, the Muslims were expected to enslave their women, children and slaves².

One has to agree with Gunaratna that the booklet Berjihad di-Patanindoes not have much of the internationalist tone of early 20th century Arab pan-Islamism, which influenced Malay publications, nor of al-Qāʿidah, which saw the oppression and struggles of Muslim peoples in terms of two warring global camps, and of Islamic solidarity across homeland-units. Gunaratna in this book has even tried to differentiate as primary the material stakes that the booklet exhorted the Patanians to defend—houses, financial wealth, children and wives, homeland—with Islam as a secondary instrument tacked onto them (pp. 9–10). Yet extended families (uluʿl-qurbā), and the honours of their women, are given high value by the Qurʿān as are property and commerce in a more critical way. Gunaratna, assisted by Acharya and Chua, here differentiates family, property, wealth—material things—from religion like a Christian, not a Muslim.

Given that the Malay booklet’s arguments leave so many of their contexts and the applications it demands unstated, it is hard to make out how far it was influenced by post-1990 Jihadist texts from the Middle East. As Gunaratna and his team point out, the isolated reference in Berjihad di-Patani to parallel jihads by Muslims “hunted down” around the globe, is meant to further energize fighting in Patani and is fleeting and generalized (p. 135): however, we have seen that so much of the booklet is gnomic. On the other hand, Gunaratna notes that following the fighting and destruction at the Krue Se mosque on 28 April 2004, VCDs on global Jihad movements were soon being sold around it (see p. 63). The authors of Berjihad di-Patani do repeatedly present themselves as standing in the continuum of a proud local Patanian tradition of Jihad—the “warrior blood” bequeathed into the veins of today’s Patanians from the jihad-

waging ancestors who in generation after generation fell in battles as “Warrior Martyrs” (*Wira Shuhadâ*).

The great Thai historian Nidhi Aeusrivongse, intent to see the 2004 uprising as a millenarian revolt by the “small people” prompted by economics, registered (2004) little input from literate Patani ‘ulamâ’ into it. He denied that any programme had been defined by any educated Islamic group to motivate the rebellion. Yet the booklet *Berjihad di-Patani* does grapple with detail when considering how Patani will be ruled after its liberation [— that independence so unlikely ever to come, given the 28: 1 odds between the two peoples!]. The two authors make themselves clear that to state a programme and visualize institutions for a post-Independence future is crucial to the struggle: if a “wrong step” is taken today, then “Muslims [could] suffer more hardships under the rule of a Muslim government than under the colonization of non-Muslims.” At this point, in a language that is much more detailed than most of its pages, the booklet calls for drafting a constitution in advance of independence to “guarantee the security of the religion, land and people.” This section outlines a sort of a constitutional theocracy of ‘ulamâ’ who will govern according to Islamic law, through ministries (among which the booklet mentioned a ministry of internal security!) Both the higher “Council of the Constitution and Traditional Custom of the State of Patani” and the lower Council that will oversee the ministries, are to be chosen by the people (there is no mention of a mechanism of periodical elections). In sketching the coming governing institutions, the booklet relates them, if ambiguously, to the old tradition of the Patani royalty as the symbol of the long struggle to wrest back independence.

The people have a right to choose a King or Sultan as well as the supreme governing Council of ‘Ulamâ’: appointing a just King of royal descent will confer “pride” on the Patanians. If the two authors took on board the decades-old yearning among some Patanians for a king or sultan who would restore the glory of an old monarchical Patani, they jumbled, blurred and confused the issue of blood-line and succession. Patani did not originally have a king of its own; this section speaks of someone related to the King of Kelantan whom all the people of Patani agreed to establish as King: this may have some reference to the last king of Patani ‘Abdul Qâdir Qamar al-Din and his son Tengku Mahmud Muhyiddin, both of whom took wives from Kelantan’s royal family. It is clear that the ‘ulamâ’ will supervise the pious upbringing and

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later behaviour of any future King. This may hint at some right of the people/the governing ‘ulama’ to depose as well as choose a king. If the closest in descent is unsuitable (=not religious enough) for the throne, then another successor King can be chosen from among other legitimate heirs (p. 142). There is a drive here to limit a future Sultan’s authority, to make him in some matters just a figurehead politically, while celebrating him in social ritual and culture. Overall, the booklet *Berjihad di-Patani* here does not want to repudiate Patani’s classical pre-Thai institutions, but it wants to shift power within them to the ‘ulamā’, and reinvent them by weaving them into new elements and institutions that could come from both the West or the Arab world. While hinting at future power to remove the King or Sultan and government officers, *Berjihad di-Patani* in another place defines the ruler as the *amīr al-mu‘minin* — the “Commander of the Believers” or Caliph — of Arab Islam’s central tradition of the classical first four, Rightly-Guided Caliphs who succeeded the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). Had any Rajā or Sultan of Patani ever claimed that universal Islamic role? The restoration of a global Caliphate is an aim of salafi Jihadist movements in the Middle East.

*Berjihad di-Patani* may be suggestive throughout, but it did give the mujāhidin some detailed ideas about what they could expect, politically, if they did wrest independence: a constitutional state to be governed by popularly-chosen ‘ulamā’ that had to implement the *sharī‘ah* or law of Islam. The booklet was genuinely Islamist in insisting that the new state had to impose the *sharī‘ah* on both Muslims and non-Muslims in Patani. The booklet was deeply religious in its sense of God, Allah, as watching over and judging the Patani freedom-fighters, and of supernatural beings from the God as aiding them in the fighting. The mujāhidūn had to avoid *shirk* — associating other things with Allah — by avoiding arrogance and when they came to exercise authority to judge with justice between all, without regard to personal feelings, as Allah watches and hears (pp. 141–144). At this point, the two authors become truly religious and submitted in a self-reflective way that might usher in some sort of democracy.

*Berjihad di-Patani* was completed in August 2002 following the 11 September destruction of the twin World Trade Center towers, and years of suicide bombings against Israelis by Hamas in resistance to the 1993 accords between Israel and the PLO. From 1982, Arab Shi‘ite suicide bombers of various political stripes had been blowing up Israeli occupation forces in Southern Lebanon, and in October 1983 had even killed 241 US troops in Bayrut. Some passages in *Berjihad di-Patani* made the possibility of death bearable in terms of an aesthetically beautiful martyrdom that would be rewarded after the Resurrection with Paradise: “The martyr blood is eager to
be spilled onto the land, to paint it red and illuminate the sky at dawn and dusk, from east to west” (p. 92). It did not, though, often go as far as Arab salafi, and Iranian and other Shi‘i, texts that leave no possibility before the person being instructed save death, most notably as suicide bombers. It is true that one brief passage of the booklet did at one point fleetingly praise self-sacrificing “death units” formed by “our Muslim brothers” outside Patani, which it patterned from the wars of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) in Arabia (see, p. 131). The more Islamist stream of Patani secessionist nationalism could one day — perhaps soon — work to churn out extremists jihadists who seek death in their cause, but on the whole this booklet still more often rather inculcated that most of the fighters it primed to attack in early 2004 would themselves win and thus live. In the upshot, and in the spirit of their booklet, when the well-armed Thai forces mowed down too many of the “invincible” Muslims in the 28 April 2004 attacks, the survivors fled.

*Berjihad di-Patani* lacked the language and associations of Malay *tasawwuf* (Sufi mysticism) in so far as it did not image that there was any special leader (a saint or wali) with direct access to God: the union with God that it offers for the *mujāhidūn*, and especially the martyrs, is an undifferentiated one that the two writers derived only from a direct reading of the Qur’an, although some recent Jihadist publications may have contributed.

The academic and also the Arabo-Muslim communities of the world are in the debt of Gunaratna, Acharya and Chua for their outline of Patani nationalist groups, their clear overview of the structure of Patani society with its varied social, educational and political groups, and for the translation their book has offered of *Waging Jihad in Patani*. They have done their best to ascertain the facts and follow them where they led them: this is a largely academic study that does not strive to induct us into any paranoia which Singapore’s ruling minority supposedly sometimes voiced over decades towards neighbouring Muslim states and populations. Rohan Gunaratna has gone straight. Oh, why not bring him in? This way, Professor Gunaratna!

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It is quite well known by now how much did 19th century German and German-writing orientalism differ from its British, French, and Dutch